



Episode 409 - False Flags: The Secret History of Al Qaeda — Part 2: 9/11

[Corbett](#) • 12/23/2021 •

"The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality—counter-moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical."

Joseph Conrad
The Secret Agent

INTRODUCTION

Alexandria, Egypt. July 23, 1954.

It's Revolution Day in Egypt and the streets of Alexandria are teeming with revelers. Two men—Victor Levy and Philip Natanson—pick their way through the crowd on their way to the cinema quarter, each nervously clutching a device in their pocket. Eyeing the fire trucks parked at the intersections, Philip leans over to Victor and whispers: "They're expecting us."

They reach the steps of the Rio Cinema just as the audience from the afternoon showing begin pouring out of the entrance. They fight their way through the stream of people and into the foyer and immediately see a man in the usual garb of an Egyptian plainclothes detective waiting for them. Philip turns to run away but instantly a wave of heat begins to sear his thigh. He tries to tell Victor to run, but no words come out. Instead, a white hot flame leaps from his trousers. He squeezes his

thigh with all his strength in a vain attempt to stop the flame before the bomb can ignite—but it's too late.

There's an explosion.

Philip lies on the ground, his arms and legs burnt black from the bomb. Victor is nowhere to be seen. Soon, a police sergeant arrives, along with the plainclothes detective. Someone in the crowd shouts, "Take care! He may have another bomb!" But the sergeant moves in all the same. "Don't worry. We were waiting for them."

The police *had* been expecting them. Victor and Philip were Egyptian Jews, members of a sleeper cell established by Israeli military intelligence in 1951.

The Israelis had watched in dismay as the military coup in Egypt in 1952 led to the rise of Gamel Abdel Nasser, who was not only hostile to Israel, but who, as a perceived anti-communist, was securing military and financial aid from the Americans and even the British. With Britain already staging talks to withdraw from their Suez military base, Israel decided to act. In 1954, they activated their military intelligence sleeper cell in the country for an audacious mission. Codenamed [Operation Susannah](#), their plan was to stage an increasingly spectacular series of bombings in Cairo and Alexandria.

The first bombing—an explosion at the Alexandria central post office on July 2nd—had gone off without a hitch. The second, a simultaneous attack on the American Libraries in Cairo and Alexandria, was similarly successful. It was their third attack—an ambitious attempt to bomb two cinemas in Cairo, two in Alexandria and the Cairo railway station—that failed, derailing the operation. Ten members of the cell were rounded up. [Of the ten](#), two committed suicide in the course of their interrogations by the Egyptian police, two more were executed, and six were sentenced to prison, eventually making their way to Israel after their release.

After decades of internal Israeli investigations, finger-pointing, political scandal and high-profile resignations, the full truth of Operation Susannah remains shrouded in official secrecy. The Israeli government did not even formally acknowledge the incident until 2005, a full half-century after the affair, when nine of the agents were [officially commended for their service](#).

But the reasoning behind the operation was revealed during one of the commissions of inquiry that was established to examine the affair. [According to one officer](#) who was given oral instructions directly from Israel's Military Intelligence chief, Binyamin Gibli:

[Our goal is] to break the West's confidence in the existing [Egyptian] regime The actions should cause arrests, demonstrations, and expressions of revenge. The Israeli origin should be totally covered while attention should be shifted to any other possible factor. The purpose is to prevent economic and military aid from the West to Egypt.

In short, the Israelis had attempted a false flag operation, hoping to blame their own spectacular acts of violence on the Muslim Brotherhood or the communists in order to destabilize Nasser's government, undermine Western confidence in its Egyptian ally, and persuade the British military to remain at their Suez base.

The operation was a failure in every sense. The cell was discovered and its members imprisoned. Their actions did *not* destabilize the Nasser government, nor did they influence the relationship between Egypt and the West. And the British *did* leave their base in 1956, after an abortive

Israeli/British/French invasion of the region was brought to an end by the US and the Soviets. But it *did* implant an idea in the minds of the Western military planners: that acts of terrorism could be staged and blamed on Muslim scapegoats to further their own political goals.

As we shall see, it was not long before America's military brass were forwarding their own operational plans making use of this tactic . . . plans that would culminate in the most spectacular terrorist attack the world had yet seen.

Part Two: 9/11

Tuesday, September 11, 2001, dawned temperate and nearly cloudless in the eastern United States.

EARLY SHOW: Miles and miles of sunshine. Miles Davis. Going to put Miles out there today. Nice as it could be across the Northeast. Rough seas still from the chop from that hurricane, but other than that it's kind of quiet around the country. We like quiet. It's quiet. It's too quiet.

SOURCE: [September 11, 2001 - 8:31am EDT on WUSA - The Early Show](#)

In a matter of moments, however, the quiet of that Tuesday morning transformed into the turbulence of 9/11, and the world seemed to turn upside down. As the events of that day played out like a Hollywood movie on TV screens around the world, the meaning of those events was still far from clear. Who was behind this attack? Why were they attacking? What did the perpetrators hope to gain from it?

And yet it was there, in the initial hours of those chaotic events—years before the congressional inquiries and presidential commissions presumed to answer those questions—that all of the essential pieces of the official story of 9/11 were laid out on the tv screens of the American public.

8:50 AM

DIANE SAWYER: We want to tell you what we know as we know it, but we just got a report in that there's been some sort of explosion at the World Trade Center in New York City. One report said—and we can't confirm any of this—that a plane may have hit one of the two towers of the World Trade Center, but again you're seeing the live pictures here.

SOURCE: [September 11, 2001 - 8:50am EDT on WJLA - ABC News Good Morning America](#)

9:03 AM

JON SCOTT: There was a pilot who flew— There was another one! We just saw— We just saw another one. We just saw another one apparently go— Another plane just flew into the second tower. This raises— This has to be deliberate, folks.

CORRESPONDENT: Well, that would begin to say that, yeah.

SCOTT: We just saw on live television as a second plane flew into the second tower of the World Trade Center. Now, given what has been going on around the world, some of the key suspects come to mind: Osama bin Laden. Who knows what?

SOURCE: [Original News Broadcast on 9/11/01](#)

11:51 AM

MARK WALSH: I was watching with my roommate—it was approximately several minutes after the first plane had hit. I saw this plane come out of nowhere and just ream right into the side of the Twin Tower, exploding through the other side. And then I witnessed both towers collapse, one first and then the second, mostly due to structural failure because the fire was just too intense.

SOURCE: [FOX News 9-11-2001 Live Coverage 8:46 A.M E.T - 5:00 P.M E.T](#)

11:54 AM

JERROLD POST: I am sure the highest degree of probability associated with this attack, which had remarkable coordination and logistical sophistication, would be Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda group.

SOURCE: [September 11, 2001 - 11:54am EDT on WTTG](#)

5:54 PM

KATIE COURIC: One senior US intelligence official says now that the US is 90% certain that bin Laden was responsible for today's attack.

SOURCE: [September 11, 2001 - 5:54pm EDT on WRC - News 4 at 5](#)

8:22 PM

PETER JENNINGS: He—an engineer and an architect—speculates here that the heat above the crash site on the twin trade towers may have indeed caused the building above to melt, just simply collapsing in itself and putting enormous weight on the rest of the building below, which could not possibly stand it. Now the steel columns which go up through the building, built to code at best, would only be able, he believes, to have been able to stand an hour or an hour and a half of intense fire like this, pressing down on the rest of the building until it finally was able to give way.

SOURCE: [September 11, 2001 - 8:22pm EDT on WJLA](#)

Remarkably, these initial, off-the-cuff speculations turned out to be—according to the various inquiries and investigations that followed—accurate in all their main respects. Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of the Al Qaeda terrorist organization, *had* planned and directed this attack. The Twin Towers *had* collapsed due to structural failure, because the fire was just too intense.

These assertions, drilled into the minds of a susceptible audience still reeling in shock from the horror of the events they had just witnessed, became the core tenets of what would become enshrined in the final report of the 9/11 Commission as the "official story" of 9/11.

In this official story, Osama bin Laden, once the "[anti-Soviet warrior on the road to peace](#)," was now an international terror kingpin. Radicalized by the arrival of US military forces in the Arabian peninsula in the Gulf War, he [issued a fatwa](#) against the United States and began a series of strikes on US targets; first bombing the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998, and then bombing the USS Cole while it was harbored in Aden in October of 2000.

According to this version of events, the 9/11 plot was hatched by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, a "highly educated" Pakistani militant who presented the "[planes operation](#)"—as the 9/11

Commission asserts it was originally known—to Osama bin Laden and his chief of operations, Mohammed Atef, in 1996. It was bin Laden, we are told, who greenlighted the operation "sometime in late 1998 or early 1999." The three of them developed a list of buildings to be targeted—the White House, the U.S. Capitol, the Pentagon, and the World Trade Center—and bin Laden himself handpicked the men he wanted to carry out the operation.

Carefully moving their operatives into place over the course of the next two years, this crack terror squad—devoted Muslim radicals willing to die for their beliefs—succeeded through a combination of skill and the colossal failure of the American intelligence complex, hindered by bureaucracy and hampered by a lack of political will to recognize the growing threat of Islamic terror.

No individual was to blame for this "failure," the official story of 9/11 concludes, but the remedy to the problems presented by the 9/11 attack was obvious: to erect a new homeland security complex, tear down the walls between foreign intelligence and domestic policing, implement warrantless surveillance and other legally dubious means of disrupting potential terror threats on the home front, and launch a war on terror abroad to bring the battle to the terrorists.

But this narrative, now enshrined as the official history of 9/11—that the 9/11 plot was hatched by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in 1996, that it was directed by terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden and that it was executed by Al Qaeda so flawlessly that the intelligence agencies could not have even envisioned it, let alone prevented it—

GEORGE W. BUSH: Nobody in our government, at least—and I don't think the prior government—could envision flying airplanes into buildings.

SOURCE: [*The President's News Conference - April 13, 2004*](#)

—is now contested in every respect, even by defenders of that official history.

As even mainstream authors like Jason Burke were forced to admit, the popular conception of Al Qaeda—that of a top-down organization with a single leader overseeing its operations—was a convenient fiction, created by the FBI so they could [prosecute bin Laden in absentia](#) for the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa. In order to prosecute bin Laden, they had to show that Al Qaeda "coordinates the activities of its global membership" and that bin Laden, as the leader of the group, bears the responsibility for any actions attributed to the organization.

JASON BURKE: The idea, which is critical to the FBI's prosecution—that bin Laden ran a coherent organization with operatives and cells all around the world, of which you could be a member—is a myth. There is no Al Qaeda organization. There is no international network with a leader, with carders who will unquestionably obey orders, with tentacles that stretch out to sleeper cells in America, in Africa, in Europe. That idea of a coherent structured terrorist network with an organized capability simply does not exist.

SOURCE: [*The Power Of Nightmares: Part 3 The Shadows In The Cave \(2004\)*](#)

Even the 9/11 Commission's final report had to admit that Al Qaeda was less of a mafia-like organization with a capo served by his faithful lieutenants and more of a funding organization for "[terrorist entrepreneurs](#)." "Al Qaeda's worldwide terrorist operations," the report conceded, "relied heavily on the ideas and work of enterprising and strong-willed field commanders who enjoyed considerable autonomy."

As we saw in Part 1 of this exploration, Origin Story, these "terrorist entrepreneurs" included among their ranks renowned international Islamic radicals—like "The Blind Sheikh," Omar Abdel Rahman—and lesser-known but incredibly prolific terror cell leaders—like Ali Mohamed—whose remarkable abilities to evade State Department watch lists and foment and direct spectacular terror attacks directly under the nose of the intelligence agencies defies explanation . . . unless one assumes, as their closest associates did, that they were working under the purview of those intelligence agencies.

In order to better understand this aspect of the story, we have to return to 1990, the year that the specter of Islamic terror appeared on the shores of the United States.

Abdullah Azzam—Osama bin Laden's mentor and co-founder with bin Laden of the Maktab al-Khidamat (MAK), or the "Office of Services," which provided funding, training and an international support network to the "Afghan Arabs" during the Soviet-Afghan war—is dead, killed in a car bombing in Peshawar, Pakistan. It is never determined who committed the assassination, but Azzam's death resolves a dispute about the future of the *jihad* movement. Azzam had favoured continuing the fight in Afghanistan, pressing for the formation of an Islamic regime in Kabul. Bin Laden had other ideas; and now, as the undisputed leader of the old MAK network, he is free to pursue those ideas under the "Al Qaeda" banner.

But "Al Qaeda," at this point, barely even exists as a propaganda construct. Despite [grandiose visions](#) of creating "a unified global *jihad* movement," the withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan and the end of the war leaves the group's future in doubt. Bin Laden returns to Saudi Arabia, looking for ways to leverage his family's wealth and power to make a name for himself in the Muslim world.

Meanwhile, in New York, the era of "Islamic terror" in the United States is about to begin.

Manhattan, New York. November 5, 1990.

Meir Kahane—an Orthodox Jewish rabbi and a [convicted terrorist](#) whose anti-Arab views were considered so extreme he was [banned from the Israeli Knesset](#)—has just finished delivering a speech in the Morgan D Room of the New York Marriott East Side Hotel. Leaving the podium, Kahane has begun mingling with the crowd. Suddenly one man, Sayyid Nosair, draws a .357 Magnum and fires, hitting Kahane twice, once in the neck.

Nosair flees, shooting one of Kahane's supporters in the leg in his rush out the door. His accomplice, Mahmud Abouhalima, is supposed to be waiting at the front door in a taxi to drive him away, but the doorman had waved Abouhalima away moments earlier, so Nosair jumps in the wrong cab by mistake. When he realizes his error, he brandishes the .357, ordering the cabbie to start driving. Instead, the driver scrambles out of the taxi and runs away.

Nosair is forced to flee on foot, racing down Lexington Avenue with his gun still in hand. Carlos Acosta, a US postal inspector, tries to stop him, drawing his weapon, but it's too late; Nosair fires first, hitting Acosta in the shoulder. Undeterred, Acosta drops to his knee, steadies himself and shoots back, hitting Nosair in the neck. Both Nosair and Kahane are rushed to Bellevue Hospital's trauma unit. Nosair survives his emergency operation. Kahane does not.

The dramatic events of that November night would culminate in an even more surprising verdict 13 months later. Not only was Nosair treated as a "lone gunman" acting of his own accord, but he was not even convicted of Kahane's murder. Despite such a brazen assassination—perpetrated in a

crowded room and followed by a spectacular chase—Nosair was acquitted of murder, convicted instead on four lesser counts, including gun possession, assault and coercion. He was sentenced to just 22 years.

So, what went wrong? The jurors contend that they had "reasonable doubt" of Nosair's guilt because "the prosecution did not offer a witness during the five-week trial who saw the defendant fire the fatal shots" and—since Kahane's family had opposed an autopsy—the fatal bullet could not be matched to Nosair's weapon. But, in reality, the fix was in from the start. As even the Congressional Joint Inquiry into the 9/11 attacks conceded in a [staff statement](#) a decade after the trial:

According to FBI officials who were interviewed, the NYPD and the District Attorney's office resisted attempts to label the Kahane assassination a 'conspiracy' despite the apparent links to a broader network of radicals. Instead, these organizations reportedly wanted the appearance of speedy justice and a quick resolution to a volatile situation. By arresting Nosair, they felt they had accomplished both.

The typically bureaucratic wording of the statement obscures the reality: the NYPD and the District Attorney's office didn't just passively resist the attempts to "label" the assassination a "conspiracy"; they deliberately covered up vitally important information that would have unwound that conspiracy and undermined the next decade of spectacular Al Qaeda terrorism.

Immediately after his arrest, forty-seven boxes of material were seized from Nosair's house in New Jersey. [Among those materials](#) were Top Secret training manuals from Fort Bragg and [Secret communiqués](#) from the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. Lest there be any doubt where the materials came from, they even discovered a video of Ali Mohammed's lectures at the Kennedy Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg. But those weren't the only pieces of evidence that connected the Kahane assassination conspiracy—now commonly portrayed as the first act of Islamic terrorism on US soil—to Ali Mohammed, the remarkable CIA asset, US Army officer and FBI informant who, we are told, was "Al Qaeda's" strangely untouchable "triple agent" in the heart of the American intelligence establishment.

El Sayyid Nosair himself—the 34-year old Egyptian-born janitor with a [penchant for Prozac](#) who quite literally got away with murder—was, as it turns out, not unknown to the authorities. In fact, he had been known to the FBI since at least the previous summer. That's when, as it was later admitted, Nosair and a ragtag bunch of associates had been surveilled loading up a convoy of vehicles with semi-automatic weapons and copious amounts of ammo and heading to the Calverton Shooting Range on Long Island.

For four consecutive Sundays in July of 1989, the FBI's elite Special Operations Group—[apparently tipped off](#) that "PLO terrorists were threatening to blow up casinos in Atlantic City"—[followed Nosair's convoy to the shooting range](#), snapping dozens of photographs of the group engaging in target practice with handguns, rifles and even an AK-47.

The group had set off from the Brooklyn Al Kifah Refugee Center—Al Qaeda's New York office, which, [as we have seen](#), not only operated in full view of the intelligence community but "doubled as a recruiting post for the CIA seeking to steer fresh troops to the *mujahideen*" in Afghanistan.

Among those in attendance at the FBI-surveilled target practice sessions:

- Nosair himself, brandishing the chrome-plated .357 that he would later use to slay Kahane;

- Clement Rodney Hampton-El, an American-born black Muslim medical technician known as "Dr. Rashid," who claimed to have been wounded in Afghanistan;
- Mahmud Abouhalima, known as "the Red" for his curly red hair, covered during the sessions by an NRA cap;
- Nidal Ayyad, a Kuwaiti who had taken classes to become a US citizen; and
- Mohammed Salameh, a Palestinian who grew up in Jordan and studied under Abdullah Azzam.

Not present at those sessions in July, however, was the group's trainer, Ali Mohammed, the remarkable Al Qaeda "triple agent" who had been taking weekend breaks from his post at the heart of the US Army's Special Forces training center at Fort Bragg to instruct the Al Kifah cell in the techniques of guerrilla warfare, including bomb-making and weapons-handling.

Nosair and his fellow Al Kifah plotters had been under surveillance by the FBI. Mohammed, their handler came straight from Fort Bragg, providing them with Top Secret government documents and personally overseeing their training. But, incredibly, none of these points were raised at Nosair's trial for the murder of Kahane. FBI officers who tried to follow the leads into the bigger plot were ordered to stand down.

INTERVIEWER: What was your feeling about the "lone gunman" theory?

ROBERT FRIEDMAN: I thought it was preposterous. Based on what my sources in the NYPD told me that they were ordered to treat this as a simple homicide, based on what my sources in the FBI told me that every time that they got a little bit ambitious and started broadening their investigation to search out El Sayyid Nosair's possible alleged terrorist links, they were told from the top to cool it, to stop investigating. That the NYPD would handle it as a simple homicide.

SOURCE: [*Hidden Path To 9/11*](#)

And, according to the official history, the boxes of Arabic documents seized from Nosair's house were not translated until years later.

Nosair's "not guilty" verdict was cheered by his supporters, and the same cadre of Ali Mohammed-trained radicals who had been surveilled at the shooting range by the FBI moved on to plot their next spectacular terror attack: the bombing of the World Trade Center.

And, as would be revealed in dramatic fashion years after the event, this plot, too, had an FBI informant at its heart.

DAN RATHER: Last winter, the FBI was praised for its speed in cracking the case of the World Trade Center bombing and bringing four suspects to trial. Now there is some evidence that the FBI may have known of the plot in advance through an informant and might—*might*—even have stopped the bombing that killed six people.

SOURCE: [*FBI could have stopped the 1993 World Trade Center bombing*](#)

When Emad Salem—a former lieutenant colonel in the Egyptian army who [arrived in the United States in 1988](#)—began working as an FBI asset, he was not originally assigned to infiltrate Islamic terror groups. No, in 1988 the Cold War was still on and the FBI tasked Salem with penetrating KGB and Russian mafia rings operating in New York City.

But by 1991, things had changed. With the Cold War over, the Bureau's priorities were shifting. Salem's handler, Nancy Floyd, who appreciated his work, thought the Egyptian informant's background might make him useful to the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force. Salem's new handlers in the Bureau's counterterror division, Louie Napoli and John Anticev, put him to work infiltrating the groups raising funds for international Islamic terror on US soil. His first priority: insinuating himself into the ring around the Blind Sheikh, Omar Abel Rahman, including El Sayyid Nosair, then on trial for the slaying of Kahane, and his Calverton shooting range associates.

Salem was remarkably successful in his assignment. Haunting the trial of Nosair, he soon befriended Nosair's cousin, Ibrahim el-Gabrowni. El-Gabrowni immediately took to the affable Egyptian, introducing Salem to Nosair in jail and describing him as "a new member of the family." In a mere matter of weeks, Salem was caught on camera as one of Rahman's bodyguards, even [personally driving the Blind Sheikh](#) to Detroit to deliver fundraising speeches.

Soon thereafter, el-Gabrowni invited Salem to join him for dinner at his Brooklyn apartment. There, after turning up the television in the dining room, explaining that he [feared the apartment was bugged](#), el-Gabrowni sought to recruit Salem for a special mission.

EMAD SALEM: I was in Brooklyn with Ibrahim el-Gabrowni. Ibrahim el-Gabrowni is Sayyid Nosair's cousin. He said that "We should start to do something, brother, so the government has some pressure and they don't put Brother Sayyid in more troubles."

So I said, "Sure, of course we should do something."

He said, "OK, and you know how to build a bomb?"

I said, "Of course! That's what we do!"

He said, "OK, I want you to build some bombs and I'll tell you later. What do you need?"

So I said to Ibrahim el-Gabrowni, "I need explosives, I need detonators, I need people to help me build the bombs, I need a safe place to build a bomb in."

He said, "OK. Let me make some phone calls to Afghanistan."

SOURCE: [*The Terror Routes - E1. 1979-1993 Angels & Demons*](#)

At this early stage, the plot was less of a precise plan and more of a vague idea, devoid of details. Even the target of the proposed attack was undecided, with Salem being told that the group intended to set off bombs at twelve "Jewish locations," including temples, banks and Jewish centres around Brooklyn and Manhattan. Without knowing it and with hardly any effort, Salem had been recruited into an operation that would eventually result in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

Salem worked the plot as best he could, meeting more of the Calverton shooting range associates and gathering information from the cell members to pass along to the Bureau. As the preparations for the bombing began to take shape, Salem's role in the FBI sting operation seemed clear: he would lead the cell along, swapping out the explosives for a harmless powder before the bombs were placed. Then, when the cell was ready to strike, the FBI would swoop in and round up the plotters.

But that is not what happened.

Salem's remarkable success in infiltrating an active plot to stage terror attacks in New York—something that most FBI assets fail to accomplish in the course of their career— is, in retrospect, stunning. But not as stunning as the FBI's response to this incredible turn of events.

As author and journalist Peter Lance, who interviewed many of the FBI personnel involved in the story, explained in his book, [*Triple Cross*](#):

[P]art of Salem's deal with the Feds was that he would be a deep cover "asset," as opposed to an informant who was willing to tape conversations and swear to his undercover evidence on the stand. Salem, who had family in Egypt, was deeply wary of the Blind Sheikh's deadly reach. So the Bureau promised him that he'd never have to wear a wire or testify in open court.

But in June 1992, Carson Dunbar—a [rising young star](#) in the FBI's New York Office—was appointed to head the counterterror division. Dunbar and his deputy, John Crouthamel, didn't trust Salem. Soon they were trying to get him to submit to additional polygraphs and, eventually, they broke their deal with Salem and demanded he wear a wire. Salem refused and withdrew from the operation, shutting the FBI out of the bomb plot.

SALEM: It was a silly, personal confrontation. And, actually, he said (and I quote him), "You son of a bitch! Coming from the Middle East, dragging sand in your shoes all the way up to here to tell me how to run my FBI and how to do my job!"

I told him, "Sir, I *am* doing your job. None of your agents could have went undercover that deep. I'm doing it, you're not."

And that even provoked him more and he said, "Get out of here!"

I walked out of his office, I looked at Nancy and John. I said, "Guys, when this bomb been built by somebody and goes off by somebody else, don't come knock on my door!"

And that was it. And I walked away.

SOURCE: [*The Terror Routes - E1. 1979-1993 Angels & Demons*](#)

With Salem out of the picture, the Ali Mohammed-trained, Blind Sheikh-supported, Al Kifah-connected cell continued on with their plot. But, with internal disputes disrupting their plans, they had to find someone else to actually build the bomb. They found that person in Ramzi Yousef.

To this day, despite having been caught, tried and convicted for the World Trade Center bombing, little is known about Ramzi Yousef's origins, or even his identity. The 9/11 Commission—[relying on the torture testimony](#) of his uncle, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed—identified him merely as a "Sunni extremist" whose real name was Abdul Basit. But this supposedly devout Muslim fundamentalist is [reported to have](#) hung out at karaoke bars and dated b-girls during his trips to the Philippines while his wife and daughters waited for him in Baluchistan. Even his birthplace remains a mystery.

What is known is that Yousef [learned bomb-making](#) in Osama bin Laden's training camps in Afghanistan in the early 1990s, [perhaps from Ali Mohammed himself](#); that in 1995 [Newsday reported](#) the FBI was "considering a probe of whether the CIA had any relationship with Yousef;"

and that in 1999 Swiss journalist Richard Labeviere [reported](#), "A classified FBI file indicates that he was recruited by the local branch of the CIA."

And, like so many of the other key operatives in the Al Qaeda story, Yousef was able to avoid regular screening procedures, waltz across borders with forged travel documents and enter the United States without a visa.

On August 31, 1992, Yousef and Ahmad Ajaj—a fellow *mujahideen* who Yousef had allegedly met at the training camps in Afghanistan—flew from Pakistan to the US despite lacking the proper travel documents to do so, a miraculous feat that the FBI [has alleged](#) was enabled by "direct assistance from senior Pakistani intelligence officials." Upon their arrival at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York on September 1st, both men were immediately detained by immigration officials.

Ajaj, acting "[loud and belligerent](#)," was caught with a crudely forged Swedish passport and taken to a back office for questioning. "The U.S. government was pretty sure Ahmad Mohammad Ajaj was a terrorist from the moment he stepped foot on U.S. soil," the *Los Angeles Times* [later reported](#), noting that his suitcases were "stuffed with fake passports, fake IDs and a cheat sheet on how to lie to U.S. immigration inspectors." But that wasn't all; among his possessions, inspectors also found two handwritten notebooks filled with bomb recipes, six bomb-making guides that included pages from [Fort Bragg military manuals](#), and four how-to videotapes concerning weaponry and surveillance training. Ajaj was charged with passport violations and sentenced to six months in prison.

Yousef, meanwhile, tried a different approach. Dressed in "[traditional peasant garb](#)" and carrying an Iraqi passport without a US visa, Yousef strode confidently up to the immigration inspector and declared himself to be a refugee seeking asylum from the oppressive Iraqi government, politely asking to be admitted into America. After being questioned and fingerprinted, one alert immigration official [noted his links to Ajaj](#) and sought to detain him, but "[there was not enough room in the INS lockup](#)," so he was released on the condition that he show up at an asylum hearing later.

Yousef then left the airport, took a cab to New York's East Village and immediately met with Mahmud Abouhalima, "the Red," who had trained with Ali Mohammed and who had served as the getaway driver for Nosair before being waved away by the hotel doorman. Yousef set about professionalizing the ragtag band of misfits, transforming their vague "Jewish locations" plot into an altogether more ambitious plan: to plant a bomb in the basement of one of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, collapsing it into the other tower and killing tens of thousands in the process. He got to work immediately, organizing the cell, renting a storage locker across the Hudson River in Jersey City and beginning the five month task of constructing the bomb.

Without Salem, the FBI ostensibly no longer had an asset in the cell to watch as the plot took shape. But, if there had been a serious investigation underway, unraveling the cell and discovering their intentions would have been trivial. Ahmad Ajaj, who had been caught with a raft of terrorist training materials and bomb-making guides, [remained in contact without Yousef](#) the whole time, speaking to him frequently via the prison phone. But, although those calls were taped, no one from the FBI or any other agency monitored or even attempted to translate those phone calls until after the World Trade Center explosion the following February, and no one traced the pair's flights back to discover that they had both boarded in Pakistan without the proper travel documents and had even sat together for the first leg of their journey to New York.

Salem even tried one last time to warn the FBI about the cell. Meeting his old handler, Nancy Floyd, at a Subway sandwich shop near the FBI's New York office in October of 1992 to collect his final \$500 cash payment, he informed her that he had heard that the group was planning a new attack and begged her to put surveillance on Abouhalima and Salameh. But it was no use. Carson Dunbar had taken her off the terror investigation and all she could do was pass along the suggestion. Salem's warning was ignored and no one followed up on the lead.

The FBI had followed the Al Kifah plotters to the shooting range, investigated their role in the Kahane murder, had an informant in their midst reporting on their plans for a spectacular terror attack and now another high-level terror operative had been allowed to enter the country and proceed with his activities unmolested, just as Ali Mohammed and the Blind Sheikh before him.

And so it was that at noon on February 26, 1993, Ramzi Yousef and Eyad Ismoil, a Jordanian associate, drove a yellow Ryder van into the underground parking garage of the World Trade Center, parking on the B-2 level. Yousef ignited the 20-foot fuse and fled. Twelve minutes later, the bomb went off.

The bomb—cutting through the parking garage with an explosive force of 150,000 pounds per square inch— might have lacked the explosive force to fulfill Yousef's goal of toppling the towers, but it *did* wreak havoc. Six people died, over a thousand were injured and 50,000 were forced to evacuate the building in the chaotic aftermath of the explosion. Learning of the bombing, Bruce Hoffman, a terrorism expert working for the Rand Corporation, [remarked](#): "We may be talking about the opening salvo of a new conflict for a New World Order."

As the investigation into the bombing began, a [letter](#) arrived in the offices of various New York newspapers claiming responsibility for the attack. The letter, sent under the name "Liberation Army, Fifth Battalion" issued three demands: end US aid to Israel, end diplomatic relations with Israel and stop interfering with the internal affairs of Middle Eastern nations. If these demands were not met, the letter promised that 150 suicide soldiers would be ready to commit more attacks, including launching strikes on "potential Nuclear targets."

If there was any doubt about who was behind the explosion, those doubts were quickly dispelled. Just two days into the investigation, in one of the FBI's first descents into the pitch-black, smoke-filled, five-story crater left by the blast, an explosives enforcement officer from the ATF found the proverbial "[needle in the haystack](#)": a [part from the Ryder van](#) itself bearing a Vehicle Identification Number.

The van rental was traced back to Mohammed Salameh, one of Ali Mohammed's trainees from the Al Kifah center. Absurdly, Salameh was apprehended on March 4, one week after the bombing, when he returned to the Ryder rental office in Jersey City to reclaim the deposit on the van. Salameh's arrest quickly led to the arrest and eventual conviction of three others in the Al Kifah cell: Nidal Ayyad, Mahmud Abouhalima and Ahmad Ajaj. It also led investigators to the apartment of Ramzi Yousef.

But it was too late. Ramzi Yousef had boarded a flight to Karachi the night of the bombing and then vanished, flying from country to country with impunity, plotting assassinations and bombings in Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines and Iran, and concocting an elaborate plot called "Bojinka" to blow up a number of airliners in mid-flight before finally being captured in Pakistan in 1995.

But it was not just Yousef himself—the mysteriously protected terror mastermind who had entered the US without a visa—who vanished. When Pakistani federal investigators later went to check their immigration records, they discovered that all of the documents pertaining to Yousef's journey to the United States in 1992, including his embarkation card, had "[mysteriously disappeared](#)."

In the wake of the bombing, the FBI—now facing enormous public pressure to round up those involved and bust the terror cell that they had infiltrated and abandoned just the year before—turned once again to Emad Salem. Once again, Salem was able to quickly penetrate the Blind Sheikh's cell and to begin working with them on a new scheme, the so-called "landmarks" plot to bomb key targets around New York City, including the UN headquarters, the Lincoln Tunnel and the George Washington Bridge. This time, the FBI arrested the plotters before they could stage their attack.

But at the trial two years later, Salem had a surprise for the prosecution. He had secretly recorded dozens of phone conversations with his FBI handlers, conversations that [revealed for the first time](#) the FBI's *real* role in the World Trade Center bombing.

JACQUELINE ADAMS: FBI agents might have been able to prevent last February's deadly explosion at New York's World Trade Center. They discussed secretly substituting harmless powder for the explosives. But they didn't, according to the FBI's own informant, Emad Salem.

Unbeknownst to the FBI at the time, Salem recorded many of his conversations with his handlers.

WILLIAM KUNSTLER: I'm holding nine hundred and three pages of draft transcripts
...

ADAMS: William Kunstler represents Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman and several others charged with conspiring to blow up a series of New York City landmarks four months after the World Trade Center bombing. That case has not yet gone to trial.

Kunstler confirmed newspaper reports of the Salem transcripts. In one, Salem complains to an FBI agent, "Since the bomb went off, I feel terrible. I feel bad. I feel: here is people who don't listen." The agent replies: "Hey, I mean it wasn't like you didn't try and I didn't try. You can't force people to do the right thing."

SOURCE: [***FBI could have stopped the 1993 World Trade Center bombing***](#)

Predictably, in the wake of the blast, the debate began to center on the government's "mismanagement" of the case. The Blind Sheikh's entry to the US had been a "mistake." The NYPD's refusal to investigate Nosair's accomplices in the killing of Kahane had just been a politically expedient omission. The FBI having pulled their informant out of an active terror plot before it developed into the World Trade Center bombing was simply "incompetence." The presence of a CIA-linked, Fort Bragg-stationed Green Beret in the midst of this radical terror cell was just an example of "blowback." And Ramzi Yousef's miraculous ability to enter and leave countries at will without the proper documentation was just the result of bureaucratic bungling and overworked immigration officials.

The admissions of "error" and professions of "blowback" verged on admissions of guilt. Even the CIA—in an internal investigation into its role in supporting the Al Kifah center's operations—[concluded](#) that the agency itself was "partly culpable" for the World Trade Center bombing.

But the "incompetence" narrative soon arrived at its inevitable conclusion: the very agencies that had so signally "bungled" every step along this path were now to be given more money and bestowed more authority to conduct their "counterterror" operations.

BILL CLINTON: This year I'll submit to Congress comprehensive legislation to strengthen our hand in combating terrorists—whether they strike at home or abroad. As the cowards who bombed the World Trade Center found out, this country will hunt down terrorists and bring them to justice.

SOURCE: [U.S. President William J. Clinton discusses his legislation to combat terrorism in his 1995 State of the Union address](#)

Others proposed a less-charitable reading of these events. Ron Kuby, the lawyer who, along with William Kunstler, acted as a defense lawyer for the accused bombers and their accomplices, did not mince words in [assigning blame](#) for the World Trade Center bombing plot:

The "mastermind" [of the plot] is the government of the United States. It was a phony, government-engineered "conspiracy" to begin with. It would never have amounted to anything had the government not planned it.

Emad Salem himself summarized the story of the World Trade Center bombing in a phone call with his FBI handler, John Anticev, that was later released to the public.

SALEM: I don't think it was. If that's what you think, guys, fine. But I don't think that because we was start already building the bomb which is [sic] went off in the World Trade Center. It was built by supervising—supervision from the Bureau and the DA and we was all informed about it. And we know that the bomb start to be built. By who? By your confidential informant. What a wonderful, great case!

And then he put his head in the sand and said, "Oh, no no no, that's not true." He is son of a bitch.

OK. It's built with a different way in another place and that's it.

SOURCE: [1993 WTC Bomb Attack: FBI Informant Emad Salem Tapes](#)

If this pattern of "missed opportunities" and "miraculous" cross-border movements really had been the result of mere "incompetence" or "inattentiveness," then the resources and attention that were thrown at the problem of international terrorism in the wake of the World Trade Center bombing would have improved the intelligence agencies' record against their erstwhile foes. But, remarkably, the scarcely believable trend of the early 1990s—that of intelligence agencies consistently "missing" the terrorists operating directly under their nose, border agents allowing known terrorists to pass from country to country unmolested, and law enforcement officials letting these Al Qaeda-linked operatives off the hook—did not just continue into the late 1990s, the trend actually accelerated. And, as Al Qaeda went from a loose-knit group of a few dozen amateur *mujahideen* at the beginning of the decade to the premiere international terrorist organization at the end of the decade, the number of "mistakes" and "missed opportunities" multiplied from the merely unbelievable to the downright impossible.

When Mahmud Abouhalima was arrested for his part in the World Trade Center plot in 1993, he [attempted to bargain with federal prosecutors](#). Abouhalima revealed the name of Wadih El-Hage—a

Lebanese-born naturalized American citizen living in Texas who the Al Kifah cell had turned to for help in purchasing weapons—and recounted his experiences in Afghanistan with Mohammed Odeh, a Palestinian from Jordan who would [later claim](#) to have provided the rifles and rocket launchers that killed 18 U.S. soldiers and wounded 73 in Mogadishu in October of 1993. Abouhalima then offered more information about the World Trade Center plot and his associates in exchange for a lighter sentence. Prosecutors turned down the deal and failed to follow up on either El-Hage or Odeh.

Ali Mohamed, meanwhile, continued in his remarkably successful mission to infiltrate the intelligence arms of the US government. After having worked for the CIA and served as a special forces instructor at Fort Bragg, his next target was the FBI. Following his honourable discharge from the Army, Mohamed returned to his wife in California and applied to be a translator for the Bureau. He was turned down for the position; instead, he was asked to [work as an FBI informant](#) in a local document forgery ring.

In 1992, the Bureau—evidently impressed with Mohamed's work—"[opened](#)" him as a [Foreign Counter Intelligence agent](#) and tasked him with gaining intelligence on a San Jose mosque. But Mohamed was assigned to a rookie agent and routine steps like administering a polygraph were never taken. As a retired special agent who worked in the FBI's New York Office later [told journalist Peter Lance](#): "One of the most unbelievable aspects of the Ali Mohamed story is that the Bureau could be dealing with this guy and they didn't put him on the box. The first thing you do with any kind of asset or informant is you polygraph him and if the relationship continues, you make him submit to continued polygraphs down the line. That is a basic principle of running informants."

Still, despite repeatedly traveling back and forth to and from the Middle East throughout the period, Mohamed remained untouchable by law enforcement and border security. In 1992, he was [detained in Rome](#) when he was discovered with a Coca-Cola can containing a secret storage compartment. Mohamed convinced the airport security that he was a security agent for the Summer Olympics in Barcelona and was released with a warning that if anything happened on the flight, he would be blamed.

In 1993, after helping Ayman Al-Zawahiri enter the US on forged documents for a fundraising tour, Mohamed traveled to Vancouver, Canada, to help an associate of Zawahiri, Essam Marzouk, enter the country. Marzouk, caught with forged Saudi passports by Canadian customs officials, was detained by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. When Mohamed arrived inquiring about his friend, he was detained by the RCMP as well. After hours of interrogation, he told them he was an FBI asset, giving them the phone number of his handler, John Zent. Zent's word was good enough. The RCMP let Mohamed go.

Mohamed's travels during this busy period included a trip to Afghanistan in the summer of 1991 to help Osama bin Laden and his fledgling Al Qaeda organization relocate to Sudan.

Osama's move to Sudan came at a time when, we are told, the wealthy Saudi was looking to cement his reputation as a holy warrior. The official story of Al Qaeda holds that during this period, bin Laden [returned briefly to Saudi Arabia](#) but, incensed by the Saudi royals' decision to invite US soldiers onto Saudi soil for the Gulf War, left the country for good.

Searching for a place to move his operations, his gaze turned across the Red Sea to Sudan, where, as luck would have it, hardline Islamic extremist Hassan al-Turabi had come to power in a military

coup just as the war was ending in Afghanistan. Heading the National Islamic Front Party, which sought to impose Sharia law in the country, al-Turabi [traveled to London](#) for a meeting of the International Muslim Brotherhood where he openly declared his intention to allow Sudan to act as a base for Islamist terror groups. By the summer of 1991, Osama bin Laden had answered that call, moving his fighters and equipment from the outskirts of Afghanistan to his new base in Sudan with the help of FBI asset Ali Mohamed.

Turabi was not the only one traveling to London to foster his terror plans, however. In between bin Laden's work establishing himself as a businessman in Sudan—using \$12 million granted him by the Saudi Binladen Group to start a bewildering array of commercial enterprises in the country, from a construction company to an investment firm to a trucking business to a tannery, a bakery, a furniture-making business and even a commercial farm employing four thousand labourers—the budding terrorist mastermind was, according to numerous sources, shuttling back and forth between Khartoum, Karachi and London.

Osama bin Laden's visits to the UK in the early 1990s include an [alleged stay](#) at the London estate of Saudi billionaire Khalid bin Mahfouz; a [meeting in Manchester](#) with representatives of an Algerian Islamic group who were [later accused](#) of being infiltrated by government moles and used to launch a series of [false flag attacks in France](#); a period of several months in 1994 when he actually lived in the UK, allegedly buying a house in Wembley through an intermediate; and, even more explosively, a 1996 trip to his London press office which was—[according to](#) Swiss journalist Richard Labeviere, citing "several Arab diplomatic sources"—"clearly under the protection of the British authorities."

Although the official story holds that bin Laden was at this time barely a blip on the US intelligence community's radar, this is contradicted by numerous lines of evidence. Ali Mohamed, for instance, had "volunteered the earliest insider description of al Qaeda that is publicly known" to the FBI in 1993, telling them that bin Laden was "building an army" to overthrow the Saudi government and admitting that he had personally trained terrorists at the camps in Afghanistan and Sudan. But the FBI, [according to The Wall Street Journal](#), was "flummoxed" by this information and made no attempt to act on it.

This "news" about Al Qaeda's activities would not have been news to the US government's main intelligence agencies, however. It was [later revealed](#) that, despite claims that the US government was only dimly aware of bin Laden at this point, he was in fact already under extensive electronic surveillance. Having obtained his voiceprint from recordings of his anti-Saddam speeches in Saudi Arabia, the NSA and CIA were already using signals intelligence to identify and monitor Bin Laden's personal satellite calls and cell phone traffic.

In another key contradiction that is never addressed by the purveyors of the official Al Qaeda story, it was during this period that Osama bin Laden—making trips to the UK under the alleged protection of British authorities and while admittedly under surveillance by American intelligence—began the streak of increasingly brazen terror attacks that, we are told, would end up in 9/11.

In 1992, Al Qaeda mounted their [first terror operation](#) against an American target. In December of that year, bombs went off outside two hotels in Aden where, it was believed, American servicemen were being quartered on their way to Somalia for Operation Restore Hope. The attack killed an Australian tourist and a Yemeni hotel worker, but no Americans; the troops had been staying at a different hotel. Osama only claimed responsibility for the bombing six years later.

In 1993, eighteen American soldiers were killed and 73 wounded in Mogadishu during an intense two-day firefight that resulted in the downing of two Black Hawk helicopters by rocket-propelled grenades. It wasn't until the release of the [9/11 Commission Report](#) in 2004, however, that the commission—citing "new information" received by "the intelligence community" in "1996-1997"—told the public that Al Qaeda had had a role in the incident.

The burnishing of bin Laden's terrorist credentials by the US government continued in 1996. In January of that year, the CIA officially opened "Alec Station," a so-called virtual station dedicated solely to tracking Osama bin Laden and his associates. Headed at first by Michael Scheuer—an analyst at the CIA's Counterterrorism Center who had taken a special interest in the Saudi exile—and named after Scheuer's son, Alec Station soon became the hub for a mostly female group of analysts who dubbed themselves "[the Manson Family](#)" because "they had acquired a reputation for crazed alarmism about the rising al-Qaeda threat."

1996 was also the year that the US government began [putting diplomatic pressure](#) on Sudan to hand over their files on bin Laden and his Al Qaeda operatives. The secret negotiations between the two countries culminated with Elfatih Erwa, Sudan's then-minister of state for defense, flying from Khartoum to Washington. There, Erwa made a stunning offer: not to turn over the Sudanese government's *records* on bin Laden, but to turn over bin Laden *himself*. Washington rejected the offer because, *The Village Voice* [later reported](#), "the FBI did not believe it had sufficient evidence to try bin Laden in a US court." Instead, they demanded that Sudan expel the supposed arch-terrorist to "any other country except Somalia." Sudan complied, protesting that Osama would simply return to Afghanistan, where there was no government for Washington to negotiate with. "We told him Sudan is no longer safe for him and creates problems for us and asked him to leave," Erwa told *The Village Voice*.

"We liquidated everything, and he left with his money. We didn't confiscate anything because there was no legal basis. Nobody had indicted him. He rented a charter plane and left in broad daylight. He was free to plot and build his network. The Americans then came back and wanted us to help track him, but by then it was too late. He didn't trust us anymore."

In June of 1996, a truck bomb exploded outside of the Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. The facility—located in the heart of the Saudi oil industry's administrative area, where the US had built its first air base and where Standard Oil first struck oil in the country, establishing what would later become ARAMCO—was housing US and allied forces involved in enforcing the Iraqi no-fly zones. The massive blast left an 85-foot crater, killing 19 and injuring hundreds.

At the time, the US blamed Tehran for the bombing, with Clinton's Defense Secretary William Perry later [admitting](#) that there was a contingency plan in place to attack Iran if the link had been proven. But by 2007, Perry had changed his assessment:

WILLIAM PERRY: I believe that the Khobar Tower bombing was probably masterminded by Osama bin Laden. I can't be sure of that, but in retrospect, that's what I believe. At the time, he was not a suspect. At the time, all of our examinations, all of the evidence, was pointing to Iran."

SOURCE: [HBO History Makers Series: A Conversation with William J. Perry](#)

One thing is for certain: in 1998, the \$150 million contract to rebuild the Khobar Towers was [awarded to the Saudi Binladin Group](#).

All of these incidents helped raise bin Laden's profile in the intelligence community, but it was a series of events in 1998 that introduced the broader public to Osama bin Laden. In February of that year, bin Laden—following up on a declaration of war against America that he had made to CNN's TV cameras in an [interview with Peter Bergen](#) the previous year—issued [his fatwa](#), calling on Muslims to kill Americans:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim.

In May of that year, John Miller—then reporting for ABC News, but soon to become the FBI's chief spokesman—traveled to Afghanistan for a dramatic *Nightline* report on "[The Most Dangerous Man You've Never Heard Of](#)" that would air on ABC the following month:

TED KOPPEL: He lives in a cave atop a range of mountains in Afghanistan. From there he controls a web of financial logistical and strategic assistance to Sunni Islamic groups engaged in what they consider a "*jihad*," or a holy war. The principal targets of their *jihad* are the Israelis and the United States. His name is Osama bin Laden, and you will meet him a little later in this program. He does nothing to undermine the profile of himself as a terrorist leader with global influence. Indeed, he seems to take considerable satisfaction in it, even though the profile has been drawn by US intelligence agencies.

[. . .]

OSAMA BIN LADEN (VIA INTERPRETER): We believe that the biggest thieves in the world are Americans and the biggest terrorists on earth are the Americans. The only way for us to fend off these assaults is by using similar means. We do not differentiate between those dressed in military uniforms and civilians; they're all targets in this *fatwa*.

[. . .]

JOHN MILLER: Bin Laden has issued these *fatwas* and made these threats before, but this time there's something different: he put a time cap on it, saying that whatever action will be taken against Americans in the Gulf, whatever violence awaits, will occur within the next few weeks.

SOURCE: [Osama bin Laden: "The Most Dangerous Man You've Never Heard Of" - June 10, 1998 - ABC News Nightline](#)

And, in August of 1998, the name of Osama bin Laden, terror mastermind, and his shadowy terror group, Al Qaeda, finally exploded into the public consciousness.

On the morning of August 7, 1998, two Saudis in Kenya—Mohammed al-'Owhali and "*Jihad* Ali" Azzam, both of whom had been in the hut when John Miller was interviewing Osama bin Laden earlier that year—loaded some boxes into their Toyota cargo truck and headed off to the American embassy in downtown Nairobi. The boxes contained two thousand pounds of TNT, aluminum nitrate and aluminum powder. At the same time, Hamden Khalif Allah Awad—an Egyptian known

as "Ahmed the German" for his fair hair—loaded a similar bomb into a gasoline truck in Tanzania and set off for the American embassy in Dar es Salaam.

The Saudis arrived at the Nairobi embassy at 10:30 AM. 'Owhali jumped out of the truck as it approached the gates, demanding that the security guard raise the drop bar protecting the entrance. The guard refused. 'Owhali threw a stun grenade into the courtyard and ran and then the bomb went off. The blast ripped the face off of the embassy building, collapsing a nearby secretarial college and lighting the tar-covered street and a nearby bus on fire. 213 were dead and 4,500 injured.

Nine minutes later, Ahmed the German parked the gasoline truck in the parking lot of the American embassy in Dar es Salaam and detonated his bomb. He had parked next to a water tanker truck, which ended up absorbing much of the blast, but the building was still badly damaged. 11 were dead and 85 injured.

The message was clear and was dutifully broadcast by media around the world: A "new" terror group had conducted a sophisticated, coordinated attack against multiple US targets overseas and its leader was waging holy war against Americans. Al Qaeda had arrived.

REPORTER: What had happened was the first major attack by al-Qaida on American targets and the worst international terrorist incident on African soil. Afterwards, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation placed al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden on its list of most wanted fugitives.

SOURCE: [*Kenya, Tanzania, US Mark 10th Anniversary of Embassy Bombings*](#)

But, like so many events in the Al Qaeda story, this attack, too, bore the fingerprints of American intelligence on each stage of its development and execution.

The attacks, prosecutors [later discovered](#), were being planned as far back as 1993, when Osama bin Laden sent his FBI/CIA/Green Beret triple agent extraordinaire, Ali Mohamed, "to survey potential U.S., British, French and Israeli targets in Nairobi." According to Mohamed's [own testimony](#):

I later went to Khartoum, where my surveillance files and photographs were reviewed by Osama bin Laden, Abu Hafs, Abu Ubaidah, and others. Bin Laden looked at the picture of the American Embassy and pointed to where a truck could go as a suicide bomber.

[Joining Mohamed](#) on the scouting mission was Anas al Liby, a member of a Libyan Al Qaeda cell known as al-Muqatila. [Described](#) as the "computer wizard of Al Qaeda's hierarchy," not only was al-Liby personally [trained by Mohamed](#) at the Al Qaeda camp in Afghanistan, he was also a protected British intelligence asset. Al-Liby applied for asylum in Britain in 1995, claiming to be a political enemy of the Libyan government. But, as *The Guardian* [later reported](#):

Astonishingly, despite suspicions that he was a high-level Al Qaeda operative, al-Liby was given political asylum in Britain and lived in Manchester until May of 2000 when he eluded a police raid on his house and fled abroad. The raid discovered a 180-page Al Qaeda 'manual for *jihad*' containing instructions for terrorist attacks.

Even more incredibly, not only did the British government grant that asylum, they then recruited al-Liby for a failed MI6 operation to assassinate Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 1996, and then let him continue to live in the country even after the embassy bombing before ultimately letting him escape. According to FBI investigator Ali Soufan, the Manchester raid didn't just nab a "manual for

jihad"; it caught al-Liby himself. As Soufan recounts in his book, [*The Black Banners*](#), the British police let al-Liby go when he denied being a terrorist. He evaded the team that was sent to follow him and fled the country, eventually ending up on the US government's most wanted list with a [\\$25 million reward](#) for his capture.

Yet another important figure in the bombing who was well-known to American intelligence was Wadiah El-Hage, the naturalized American citizen who had assisted the Al Kifah plotters and who Mahmud Abouhalima had identified to prosecutors after his arrest for the World Trade Center bombing. As was later revealed, US intelligence had El-Hage under surveillance during the entire period that the embassy bombing plot was being hatched, but once again merely watched as the attack unfolded. As *The Los Angeles Times* [detailed](#):

The CIA and the FBI missed key opportunities to prevent the blasts. They knew from wiretaps on El-Hage's four Nairobi phones, as well as from the computer files they had seized, that Al Qaeda was forming a terror cell in the Kenyan capital. Indeed, U.S. agents had in hand the names and identities of some of the key Nairobi cell members who would rent the bomb factory, build the bomb, buy the bomb truck, brief the suicide bombers and even escort the bomb truck the day of the attack.

Author Simon Reeve revealed even more damning evidence about CIA involvement in the plot in his 1999 book, *The New Jackals*. "The CIA also had informants working within the east Africa cell," he [reported](#), citing an interview with a CIA official, "but they apparently failed to warn of Bin Laden's plans."

Even if the CIA's sources within the plot had somehow "failed" to warn them of the attack, the fact that multiple members of the cell under their surveillance—including Abdullah Ahmed Abdulah, Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani, Usama al-Kini, Mohammed Sadiq Odeh and five other conspirators—[all fled Kenya for Pakistan](#) the night before the bombing would have instantly raised alarm bells if the agency's intention had been to prevent an attack.

Instead, the plotters conspired with CIA informants in their midst and the attacks went ahead under the watchful eye of CIA, NSA and FBI surveillance.

However they transpired, the bombings succeeded in introducing Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda to the world stage. Despite the years of intelligence agency surveillance and even the creation of a virtual CIA station dedicated solely to the capture, arrest or assassination of bin Laden and his network, it wasn't until after the embassy bombings that the world at large began to hear the name of Osama bin Laden.

On August 20th—three weeks after the bombing and just three days after being publicly interrogated about the Monica Lewinsky affair—President Clinton ordered a missile strike on alleged Al Qaeda targets in Afghanistan and Sudan, boldly proclaiming that actions against bin Laden and international terror had become a new mission for the US military.

CLINTON: Today I ordered our armed forces to strike at terrorist-related facilities in Afghanistan and Sudan because of the imminent threat they presented to our national security. I want to speak with you about the objective of this action and why it was necessary. Our target was terror. Our mission was clear—to strike at the network of radical groups affiliated with and funded by Osama bin Laden, perhaps the preeminent organizer and financier of international terrorism in the world today.

SOURCE: [*Statement on Military Strikes in Sudan and Afghanistan \(1998\)*](#)

The strike, however—a barrage of 66 Tomahawk cruise missiles targeting Al Qaeda's camp in Khost, Afghanistan and a pharmaceutical plant thought to be manufacturing chemical weapons in Khartoum—was a spectacular failure on almost every level. Neither bin Laden nor Zawahiri were killed in the attacks and the "chemical weapons" plant in Khartoum had nothing to do with either bin Laden or chemical weapons, but was in fact manufacturing much-needed medicines for the region. The plant's destruction—in the [estimation of Werner Daum](#), then Germany's ambassador to Sudan—led to "several tens of thousands" of deaths in the region.

Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's longtime associate and future leader of Al Qaeda, was on one of bin Laden's monitored satellite phones at the time of the attack, telling BBC journalist Rahumullah Yusufzai that "Bin Laden has a message. He says, 'I have not bombed the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. I have declared *jihād*, but I was not involved.'" Zawahiri's exact position would have been immediately detectable by American surveillance aircraft in the region, but—in a move that journalist Lawrence Wright [called "inexplicable"](#)—the aircraft were not available prior to the strike, and Zawahiri escaped unscathed.

Bin Laden, meanwhile, was—according to CIA intelligence gleaned from intercepted satellite calls—going to be at his training camp in Khost the day of the missile strike. But he was not. He was, Clinton counterterror czar Richard Clarke [later speculated](#), tipped off about the attack by "a retired head of the ISI," Pakistan's intelligence service that had long been known as an adjunct of the CIA.

The attacks *did* succeed in two key respects, however: they kept Clinton's personal dalliances in the Oval Office from leading America's nightly news broadcasts for at least one news cycle and they reinforced the importance of the new threat to global security: Osama bin Laden.

This "new threat" provided a green light for the American security establishment and its allies around the world to ramp up operations in the name of fighting the Al Qaeda menace. The FBI began an international investigation of the bombing, the CIA began a "surge" of reporting on terror threats that counterterror officials [later complained](#) overwhelmed the system and diverted attention and resources, and in November of 1998 the United States federal court finally issued its [first public indictment](#) of Osama bin Laden.

The [first international arrest warrant](#) for bin Laden—a confidential document intended only for police and judicial authorities—had in fact already been [issued in April of that year](#), but it was not issued by the US. Instead, it was the Libyan government that had issued the warrant through Interpol. They were pursuing the terror mastermind for his part in the murder of two German intelligence agents in Libya in 1994. At the time, despite publicly recognizing bin Laden as the premier financier of international terrorism, the US and British governments [downplayed the document](#), even making sure to scrub the charges against Osama and any mention of Libya's role in issuing the document from the public record.

But this surge in activity around the Al Qaeda threat resulted in at least one surprising development. In one of the most consequential and underreported moves in this redoubled counterterrorism effort, Ali Mohamed was finally arrested.

Contacted in the days after the bombing, Mohamed [admitted to FBI agents](#) that he knew who had carried out the attack but would not give the government the names. Subpoenaed to appear before a grand jury in the Southern District of New York, he was finally arrested, although even the charges

against him were [kept secret from the public](#). On October 20, 2000, Mohamed [pled guilty](#) to involvement in the embassy bombings, but he was [never sentenced](#). He then disappeared from sight forever, held in what was later reported as "[protective custody](#)." To this day, there is no public record of Ali Mohamed—the ex-US Sergeant and FBI asset who admitted to his key role in Al Qaeda—ever being sentenced. There is no public record of his incarceration. And there are only a [handful](#) of [accounts](#) that have ever surfaced from people who talked to him in prison in the aftermath of 9/11.

And, just like that, one of the deepest mysteries of the Al Qaeda story disappeared from public sight, never to be seen again.

But, despite all this increased activity, the same pattern of "oversights" and "mistakes" by the intelligence agencies continued unabated.

On October 12, 2000, when a small fiberglass fishing boat approached the massive, 8,300-ton *USS Cole*—a billion-dollar guided-missile destroyer employing the latest stealth technology and armed with Tomahawk cruise missiles, anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles and a five-inch canon—the sailors onboard watched in amusement. The tiny skiff stopped amidships and two men stood up, waving and smiling. Then, a bomb exploded.

The boat had been carrying over 400 pounds of C4 explosive molded into a shaped charge. The explosion was immense, knocking over cars passing by onshore. In the city, miles away, people believed there was an earthquake taking place. The blast tore a hole forty feet by forty feet in the hull of the *Cole*, killing 17 US servicemen and injuring 39 more. It was the deadliest attack on a US destroyer in over a decade.

But this attack, like all of Al Qaeda's spectacular terror attacks of the 1990s, was preceded by a string of "missed opportunities" and "unheeded warnings." Not only was there intelligence about a potential attack on a US naval ship from several different sources—including [reports from multiple informants](#) and intercepted [phone calls](#) to Al Qaeda's NSA-monitored Yemen communications hub—but, as Congressman Curt Weldon revealed in 2005, a secret military intelligence operation codenamed Able Danger actually warned the Pentagon days before the bombing that an attack was going to take place in Yemen.

CURT WELDON: But two weeks before the attack on the *Cole*—in fact, two days before the attack on the *Cole*—they saw an increase of activity that led them to say to the senior leadership in the Pentagon at that time and the Clinton administration, "There's something going to happen in Yemen and we better be on high alert." But it was discounted. That story has yet to be told to the American people. Another Able Danger successful activity that was thwarted.

SOURCE: [Able Danger: Intel Gag](#)

But even after the spectacular "failure" of these intelligence agencies to thwart the attack, and despite President Clinton's assurance that he would find and retaliate against the bomb plotters . . .

CLINTON: If, as it now appears, this was an act of terrorism, it was a despicable and cowardly act. We will find out who was responsible and hold them accountable.

SOURCE: [President Clinton's Statement on the USS Cole Bombing](#)

. . . the CIA repeatedly denied FBI investigators access to key information about the plot.

But, it turns out, the CIA *did* have such information. And *that* information—deliberately withheld from the FBI or any other investigative agency—led directly into the heart of the operation behind the next spectacular terror attack to be blamed on Al Qaeda: 9/11.

From the beginning, 9/11 was presented to the public as an open-and-shut case. Osama bin Laden's name was raised on air by the TV news anchors within seconds of the second plane strike and was endlessly repeated in the hours and days that followed. By the end of the week, the public was convinced that the events were the work of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda and all of the subsequent "investigations" and commissions only served to bolster that pre-formed conclusion.

So it was no surprise at all when, on September 14, 2001, the FBI released its [list of nineteen hijackers](#), Muslims with Arabic names who, we were told, had been sent by bin Laden on a suicide mission.

But who were these men?

For the general public, the newscasters' solemn intonation that the nineteen hijackers had been identified, followed by a mugshot-like lineup of photographs, was all that was needed to cement the case in their minds. Those who required more detail turned to made-for-TV dramas and documentaries to learn about the so-called "Hamburg cell" of radicalized Al Qaeda soldiers, which included Mohammed Atta, Ziad Jarrah and Marwan al-Shehhi, three of the alleged suicide pilots. Finally, the 9/11 Commission and its associated monographs—like the staff report on [9/11 and Terrorist Travel](#)—attempted to fill in the paper trail for researchers concerned about the documentary record of these men, including their motivations and their movement.

From these accounts, a picture emerged. These nineteen terrorists, crack operatives handpicked by Osama bin Laden and trained in his terror camps in Afghanistan, had used their carefully honed spycraft to slip into the country, deftly avoiding scrutiny from the authorities even as they trained at flight schools in the US and finalized the operational details of their plan. Then, after years of meticulous preparation, these men, consumed by their hatred of the West, their love of Allah and their devotion to bin Laden—deftly piloted their planes into their targets, wreaking havoc and devastation exactly as planned.

But this story, too, is a carefully constructed lie, every part of which falls apart under sustained scrutiny.

In the official conspiracy theory of 9/11, the alleged hijackers were such devout fundamentalist Muslims that they were willing to give their lives for the cause. Marwan al-Shehhi, we were told, was so devoted to his religious beliefs that he [observed the Ramadan fast](#) against medical advice after a stomach operation, causing him to fall severely ill. Ziad Jarrah, [meanwhile](#), "initially caroused and smoked" during his early days in Hamburg but "then grew intensely religious and withdrawn." And, [according to award-winning journalist Lawrence Wright](#), Mohammed Atta's "extreme rigidity of character" made him into a ruthless killer who "constantly demonstrated an aversion to women."

When reporters began following the trail that these supposed suicide soldiers had left behind, however, they began to uncover an altogether different story. Atta and his associates frequented strip clubs in [San Diego](#), [Las Vegas](#) and [Daytona Beach](#), where they [drank alcohol and ordered lap dances](#). They hung out for days at a time [at Harry's Bar](#) in New York, where Atta [preferred a table](#)

[near the piano](#). And, three nights before the attack, Atta and al-Shehhi [went to Shuckums Oyster Bar](#) in Fort Lauderdale, where, according to bar manager Tony Amos, they consumed several drinks, became drunk and gave the bartender a hard time about the bill.

"The guy Mohamed was drunk, his voice was slurred and he had a thick accent," Amos [told the Associated Press](#) the day after 9/11.

Even *The New York Times* [reported](#) on Atta and al-Shehhi's "high life" during multiple visits to the Philippines between 1998 and 2000, where the pair of strict religious fundamentalists and an entourage of Arab men and their girlfriends flashed money, drank and partied regularly. "Many times I saw him let a girl go at the gate in the morning," the *Times* quoted one hotel chambermaid as recalling about Atta. "It was always a different girl."

And, during his research for [Welcome to Terrorland](#)—an investigation into the Venice, Florida, flight schools where Mohammed Atta, Marwan al-Shehhi and Ziad Jarrah were enrolled in the year 2000—Daniel Hopsicker interviewed Amanda Keller, a former stripper who [claimed to have been Atta's girlfriend](#) during his time in Venice and who shared more stories about the partying of these alleged *jihadis*.

AMANDA KELLER: These guys had money flowing out their ass—excuse my language. But they never seemed to run out of money. I mean they were just tossing money left and right. I mean, it was just like, 'Oh my God!' And they had they had massive supplies of cocaine. Whenever they'd run out, they'd go to the flight school.

SOURCE: [Mohamed Atta Girlfriend Amanda Keller](#)

But Hopsicker's investigation uncovered more than just the alleged hijackers' trail of booze, drugs and women. He also became one of the only reporters to look into the strange connections of Huffman Aviation and the Florida Flight Training Center in Venice, Florida, where Atta, al-Shehhi and Jarrah trained the year before September 11th. Huffman Aviation was also the flight school that Yeslam bin Laden, Osama's half-brother, [paid for flight lessons](#) for one of his acquaintances.

The flight school was run by Rudi Dekkers, a Dutch native who was [running a commuter airline with Wally Hilliard](#). Hilliard—the founder and former president of a Green Bay, Wisconsin-based insurance company—made news in October 2000 when his personal jet was found to be [transporting 42 pounds of heroin](#) and was seized by federal agents in what was called the [biggest drug bust in central Florida history](#). But Hilliard's charter airline start-up had high-level political support: Jeb Bush, then Governor of Florida, [posed for photo ops](#) in support of Hilliard's airline.

Dekkers, meanwhile, was [arrested in 2012](#), having told an undercover agent—in the words of the [criminal complaint against him](#)—that he was "involved in narcotics transportation via private aircraft and that he has flown narcotics and U.S. currency previously without any problems." He was carrying over 18 kilograms of cocaine and nearly one kilogram of heroin [at the time of his arrest](#).

Despite the many questions that still hang over the alleged hijackers' activities in Venice and their connection to the drug-running that was allegedly taking place at the Venice airport, an even deeper question was soon to emerge: How did these pilots—who were rated as competent at best and who, [one instructor insisted](#), should have been further along the flight school curriculum than they were

—manage to fly jumbo jets that require thousands of hours of flying experience with such precision?

That question is even more important in the case of the other alleged 9/11 pilot, Hani Hanjour, the diminutive 5'5" Saudi who, the official story tells us, helped overpower grizzled Navy Top Gun honor graduate Chuck Burlingame and his flight crew at the controls of American Airlines Flight 77. According to that story, Hanjour allegedly flew a Boeing 757 with what aviation sources for *The Washington Post* described as "extraordinary skill" through a 7,000-foot spiral descent to hit the Pentagon, a move that veteran airline pilot Ed Soliday [told the 9/11 Commission](#) would be "tough for any airline pilot, including himself," and which left one radar operator at Dulles Airport [stunned](#): "The speed, the maneuverability, the way that he turned, we all thought in the radar room, all of us experienced air traffic controllers, that that was a military plane."

But Hanjour, by all accounts, was a [completely inept pilot](#). He dropped out of his first flight school, the Sierra Academy of Aeronautics, after only a few classes. He then dropped out of his next school, Cockpit Resource Management in Scottsdale, Arizona, after the school's owner dismissed him as a "weak student" who was "wasting our resources." When he returned to that school again the following year, the school owner refused, asserting: "You're never going to make it." An instructor at his next school, Sawyer Aviation, called him a "neophyte" who "got overwhelmed with the instruments" in the school's flight simulator. An instructor at his *next* school [concurred](#): Hanjour had "no motivation, a poor understanding of the basic principles of aviation, and poor judgment, combined with poor technical skills."

After [bypassing the FAA](#) to obtain a commercial pilot's license from a for-profit contractor, the operation manager at yet another flight school in the Phoenix area, Peggy Chevette, [told Fox News](#) that Hanjour was clearly unqualified to be in the cockpit: "I couldn't believe that he had a license of any kind with the skills that he had." Even *The New York Times* conceded that the remarkable flight attributed to Hanjour on 9/11 was inexplicable. In an article headlined "[A Trainee Noted For Incompetence](#)," the paper quoted one former flight school employee who knew Hanjour as saying: "I'm still to this day amazed that he could have flown into the Pentagon. He could not fly at all."

Whatever the case, what would eventually become the official explanation for this seeming incongruity—namely, that the single engine aircraft training and jet simulation training that they had received was good enough for these men to jump into the cockpit of commercial jet airliners and pilot them hundreds of miles to their targets—was rejected in the first hours of the attack as completely implausible.

COURIC: And meanwhile they *did* spend seven months at this flying school in Venice, according to these records. And although they were not trained to fly jets, do people believe that what they learned there is easily transferrable to, say, a 757 or a 767?

SANDERS: Actually, no, they don't say it's easily transferrable, because it's such a different type of jet. But, nonetheless, they got that initial training in Venice, Florida. Whether their training continued elsewhere—you have to assume it took place somewhere else. Where they learned it, though, at this point, I don't know and the FBI hasn't told us.

COURIC: Alright . . .

SOURCE: [September 12, 2001 - 11:49am EDT on WRC](#)

A [Newsweek story](#) of September 15, 2001, provided one potential answer to this puzzle. According to a "high-ranking US Navy source" cited by the report, "[t]hree of the alleged hijackers listed their address on drivers licenses and car registrations as the Naval Air Station in Pensacola," and, according to a separate "high-ranking Pentagon official," another of the alleged hijackers "may have received language instruction at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio." But this report—like the subsequent reports of people with the same name as the alleged hijackers turning up alive and well in the wake of 9/11, which [prompted the FBI to apologize](#) to one mistakenly named suspect and forced FBI Director Robert Mueller to [acknowledge](#) that they were not certain of the identities of several of the named men—were eventually dismissed as mere confusion over common Arab names.

On September 28, 2001, the FBI released the [final list of names and photographs](#) of the alleged hijackers, and this rogues' gallery of fearsome Al Qaeda operatives was cemented in the public imagination.

So who *were* these nineteen men? If they really were who the FBI said they were, who directed them? How were they supposed to have entered the United States? How did they fund their operations? And how did they evade detection while living openly in the US for months and in some cases years?

In the months after the attacks, we [were told](#) that the men identified by the FBI as the culprits had "moved through Europe and America unnoticed" and that although several of them "had been tracked by intelligence until they got inside the United States," they were ultimately "lost."

We [were told](#) that Al Qaeda's communications *had* been monitored, but that bin Laden and his henchman used "scramblers, Internet encryption, fiber optics" so it was "very hard" to intercept those transmissions.

And we were told that no one was to blame for the attacks, which had merely been a "failure of imagination."

THOMAS KEAN: As we detail in our report, this was a failure of policy, management, capability, and above all, a failure of imagination.

SOURCE: [September 11 Commission Report Release](#)

But, as the public was to learn in bits and pieces over the course of the next two decades, every one of these assertions was a demonstrable lie.

This alleged team of crack Al Qaeda operatives did *not* "move through Europe and America unnoticed." Their communications were *not* rendered opaque to the intelligence agencies because of "fiber optics." Their successful penetration of America's defenses was *not* due to a "failure of imagination."

Instead—as even the official story of the attacks now concedes—*every* major branch of US intelligence had key pieces of information on these Al Qaeda operatives, their communications, their movements and their plans. In fact, as can now be shown from official sources, these agencies not only deliberately allowed these operatives to proceed unmolested but actively stopped investigators and agents within their ranks from blowing the whistle on the plot.

At the FBI, Special Agent Robert Wright led an investigation into terrorist financing called [Vulgar Betrayal](#) that managed to uncover a money trail connecting a suspected Chicago terror cell to Al Qaeda. But when Wright attempted to bring criminal charges against the cell members, his supervisor flew into a rage, [shouting](#): "You will not open criminal investigations. I forbid any of you. You will not open criminal investigations against any of these intelligence subjects."

After the embassy bombings, when Wright's team began to trace the financing of the attacks to a group of Saudi businessmen, the FBI moved to shut down the investigation altogether. Wright was kicked off the case in 1999, and Vulgar Betrayal was officially shut down in 2000.

ROBERT WRIGHT: Knowing what I know—and again, this was written 91 days before the attack—knowing what I know, I can confidently say that until the investigative responsibilities for terrorism are removed from the FBI, I will not feel safe.

SOURCE: [9-11 FBI Whistleblower Robert Wright Testimony](#)

While Wright was pursuing the financial trail, FBI field agents across the US were picking up on another trend: Muslim extremists learning to fly.

Agents in [Oklahoma](#) and [Phoenix](#) both wrote memos about the "large numbers of Middle Eastern males receiving flight training" and warned that some of them had documentable ties to Al Qaeda, but the warnings were ignored. Agents in Minneapolis frantically sought approval for a search warrant to search the laptop of Zacarias Moussaoui, a suspected terrorist who had been receiving flight training in the area.

When that request was denied, one exasperated agent [told FBI headquarters](#) that he was "trying to keep someone from taking a plane and crashing into the World Trade Center." Rita Flack, an intelligence operations specialist at headquarters who had read the Phoenix memo, failed to pass *that* info on to any of her colleagues involved in the decision to deny the warrant to search Moussaoui's laptop.

FBI whistleblower Colleen Rowley later [revealed](#) that agents in the Minneapolis office—desperately trying to find an answer to the question of why the Bureau was deliberately sabotaging the case—faced the problem with [gallows humour](#): "I know I shouldn't be flippant about this, but jokes were actually made that the key FBIHQ personnel had to be spies or moles, like Robert Hansen, who were actually working for Osama bin Laden to have so undercut Minneapolis' effort."

The Pentagon's intelligence branch, meanwhile, not only had foreknowledge of the plot, but—according to information that emerged years later and was quickly suppressed—had identified four of the presumed terror operatives and mapped out the network connecting them to the Brooklyn cell headed by the Blind Sheikh.

"Able Danger" was a classified information operations campaign against transnational terrorism launched by military intelligence in the fall of 1999. First [revealed to the public](#) in June 2005, Able Danger employed data mining techniques on open source and classified information to identify networks of likely terror agents, including those operating in the US.

The program was remarkably successful: not only did it warn the Pentagon of an impending attack just days before the *Cole* bombing, as we have already seen, but, according to Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) whistleblower Lt. Col. Anthony Shaffer and four of his colleagues working on the

operation, Able Danger identified two of the terror cells connecting Al Qaeda to the alleged hijackers. It even [identified four of those suspects](#)—including Mohamed Atta—by name.

When Lt. Col. Shaffer tried to set up a meeting between his supervisor and FBI officials in Washington to discuss a collaborative approach to tracking these cells, he was rebuffed by lawyers for the Pentagon's Special Operations Command. Shortly thereafter, Shaffer was ordered off the Able Danger team and the unit was disbanded, with the [Pentagon ordering all the Able Danger data](#)—2.5 terabytes worth of information, equivalent to one quarter of all the printed material in the Library of Congress—destroyed.

After a hostile investigation that left witnesses feeling intimidated into changing their story about Able Danger *still* found five Pentagon employees who said they *had* seen the organizational chart with Atta's name on it, the Department of Defense Inspector General [concluded](#) that Able Danger had never identified Atta or any other alleged hijacker. And, just two months after the story became public—including Shaffer's revelation that he had met with 9/11 Commission Executive Director Philip Zelikow and told him all of the details of the program in an extensive hour-long debriefing in Afghanistan that did *not* find its way into the Commission's final report—the DIA stripped Shaffer of his security clearance, essentially ending his decades-long career as a military intelligence officer.

WELDON: Mr. Speaker, this is not some third-rate burglary cover-up. This is not some Watergate incident. This is an attempt to prevent the American people from knowing the facts about how we could have prevented 9/11, and people are covering it up today! And they're ruining the career of a military officer to do it, and we can't let it stand!

SOURCE: [Curt Weldon House Session October 19, 2005](#)

The NSA, meanwhile—despite the "scrambler and fiber optics" excuses of the agency's apologists—were monitoring all of the communications going through Al Qaeda's pivotal Yemen communications hub from the lead-up to the Embassy bombings straight through to the execution of 9/11 itself. This "communications hub"—discovered in 1996 when the NSA began tapping into and transcribing the satellite phone calls of bin Laden—was, in fact, the [home of Ahmed al-Hada](#), one of the *jihadis* who had fought alongside bin Laden against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Hada's phone was used by various Al Qaeda-linked operatives to pass messages to each other, as some countries blocked or monitored calls to other countries as possible terrorist communications.

The NSA listened as Mohamed al-'Owhali, one of the bombers involved in the embassy attack, [made multiple calls to the hub](#) before and after the attack. They listened as Al Qaeda operatives called the hub to discuss attacking a US warship in the months prior to the *Cole* bombing. And they listened as numerous terror suspects called to discuss their operations with Khalid al-Mihdhar, one of the alleged 9/11 hijackers and the [son-in-law of Ahmed al-Hada](#).

Thomas Drake was a decorated United States Air Force and United States Navy veteran with a background in military crypto-electronics who had worked for twelve years as an outside contractor at the NSA. 9/11 was his first full day as an employee of the agency, and it was in the wake of that attack that he was handed a report from one of his colleagues in the NSA's "CounterTerror Shop" that laid out the agency's role in the events of that day.

[According to Drake](#), the report was "an extraordinarily detailed long-term study of Al Qaeda's activities" that identified "the planning cells" for 9/11, including "a number of the hijackers based

on actual copy: Atta, Hazmi, Mihdhar," all of whom had appeared on the NSA's radar by the start of 2001. It also contained specific warnings about 9/11.

Drake immediately gave the document to his supervisor, Maureen Baginski, who told him: "Tom, I wish you had not brought this to my attention." He was subsequently forced out of his position, stripped of his security clearance and [indicted under the Espionage Act](#).

On the day of the attacks, knowing the information that the NSA had that could have foiled the plot, the analysts began to break down. Two staffers suffered heart attacks, with one dying. Another, a female analyst who had been responsible for monitoring the Yemen hub communications, left NSA headquarters after suffering what Drake was told was a nervous breakdown. Yet another, a 40-something man, began openly crying in a hallway, telling three women he was talking to in full view of everyone passing: "We knew this was being planned months ago, but they would not let us issue the reports we wrote."

NSA leadership, however, like Drake's supervisor and the head of the SIGINT division, Maureen Baginski, had a different reaction to the events unfolding that morning.

THOMAS DRAKE: I would hear the following phrase, which I think one person in particular probably regrets ever saying more publicly, that 9/11 was a gift to NSA. A gift.

SOURCE: [*Thomas Drake: '9/11 Became a Profit Center' for the NSA*](#)

In fact, the story of intelligence agency foreknowledge of the plot goes from the merely impossible to the outright absurd when it is revealed that it wasn't just US intelligence that had a window into the plot, but every major intelligence service in the world.

In subsequent years, it has [emerged](#) that intelligence agencies in [Indonesia](#), the [UK](#), [Germany](#), [Italy](#), [Egypt](#), [Russia](#), [Jordan](#), [France](#) and, of course, [Israel](#) had all passed on various warnings about an imminent attack in the months and years leading up to 9/11.

And, infamously, the President received a [classified intelligence briefing](#) on August 6, 2001, that unequivocally stated that an attack was being prepared.

RICHARD BEN-VENISTE: Isn't it a fact, Dr. Rice, that the August 6th PDB warned against possible attacks in this country? And I ask you whether you recall the title of that PDB?

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: I believe the title was, "Bin Laden Determined to Attack Inside the United States."

SOURCE: [*Excerpts from April 8, 2004 Testimony of Dr. Condoleezza Rice Before the 9/11 Commission Pertaining to The President's Daily Brief of August 6, 2001*](#)

It's no surprise that this plot—the most important ever attempted by Al Qaeda—would have been known by so many. Not only did the men that (we are told) bin Laden handpicked for the operation make no effort to hide their movements or obscure their activities, they instead—in the words of some investigators—left a deliberate trail behind them, a trail that was picked up and extensively reported on in the immediate wake of the attacks.

NARRATOR: Customs inspectors at Dubai airport became suspicious when they noticed that Jarrah had pasted a page of the Koran into his passport. When they searched his luggage, they discovered piles of radical Muslim propaganda. What he did next remains a mystery to terrorism experts worldwide: he talked freely about his future plans.

SOURCE: [*The 9/11 Hijackers: Inside The Hamburg Cell*](#)

ANCHOR: One possible clue has developed in Florida. A car was towed from the Daytona Beach airport to this impound lot near Daytona. An airport worker called police because the car had photographs of Osama bin Laden in the back seat.

SOURCE: [*September 12, 2001 - 12:01pm EDT on WUSA*](#)

KERRY SANDERS: . . . and that's why they geared up the FBI agents in the field immediately, and they located him in South Florida, and again over on the West coast of Florida in Venice—

KATIE COURIC: Were they surprised, Kerry, that he wasn't traveling under an assumed name?

SANDERS: I think they are, but clearly from what the indications are at this point these terrorists are not hiding after the fact or anything like that. I think that—one of the agents told me that what he believes is that they wanted to leave this trail.

SOURCE: [*September 12, 2001 - 11:49am EDT on WRC*](#)

Perhaps the greatest clue as to the real nature of the 9/11 operation, however, is found in one of the most stunning pieces of evidence of direct intelligence agency complicity in the plot. In the years after the attack, it was revealed that the CIA were not just surveilling the supposed hijackers or gathering information on their plans; they actively stopped information about these men's travels from reaching other intelligence agencies, deliberately hiding the fact that two of these agents had entered the US and were openly living in the country from the FBI and even from the National Security Council itself for over one and a half years.

This incredible fact, buried in [footnote 44 of chapter 6](#) of the 9/11 Commission report, was no trivial detail.

9/11 Commission chair Thomas Kean called it "one of the most troubling aspects of our entire report."

White House counterterror czar Richard Clarke said that it is evidence of both CIA malfeasance and misfeasance.

And Mark Rossini, an FBI agent assigned to the CIA's bin Laden unit, believed it to be part of a secret intelligence operation involving these supposed terrorist hijackers that the agency didn't want anyone to discover.

MARK ROSSINI: You know, the Agency had an obligation to tell the Bureau about these individuals, and in particular when it was determined that they did go on to the U.S., that they did travel to America. I think they had some sort of operational plan going on they didn't want the Bureau to know about.

SOURCE: [*Who Is Rich Blee?*](#)

Shortly after the *Cole* bombing, Fahad al-Quso, a Yemeni with known links to Osama bin Laden, was interrogated by Yemeni agents and admitted that he had flown from Yemen to Bangkok the previous January to deliver \$36,000 to "Khallad," a terrorist based in Malaysia who Quso identified as the bombing mastermind. The money, Quso said, was to buy this one-legged terror mastermind an artificial leg.

But Ali Soufan—the head of the FBI investigation into the *Cole* bombing—was [puzzled by this lead](#). Why was Al Qaeda transferring money *out* of Yemen when they were supposedly planning an attack *in* that country? Was this money for a different operation?

As with every such lead, Soufan followed up with an official request to the CIA for any information they had on "Khallad" in Malaysia or the phone number that Quso had used to contact him there. The CIA never responded to any of these official requests.

But Soufan's intuitions were correct.

On December 29, 1999—with all of the US intelligence services on heightened alert due to the threat of millennium terror attacks—the NSA [shares information](#) from their wiretap of Al Qaeda's Yemen communications hub with the CIA: Khalid Al-Mihdhar, Nawaf Alhazmi, and Salem Alhazmi will be flying to Malaysia to attend an important Al Qaeda summit the following month. The CIA, already aware of Al-Mihdhar's connection to the Yemen communications hub, tasks agents from eight CIA offices and six friendly foreign intelligence services with tracking his travel to Malaysia.

The surveillance operation is successful. When Al-Mihdhar changes planes in Dubai, the CIA [obtains a copy](#) of his passport. Inside is a vital piece of information: this known bin Laden associate, on his way to an Al Qaeda summit, has a [visa to enter the United States](#). A visa that was issued at the same Jeddah consulate where, Michael Springmann testified, the CIA was helping to secure visas for Osama bin Laden's men during the Afghan-Soviet war.

Seasoned intelligence officials have no trouble understanding the importance of this fact. Reflecting on the incredible nature of this series of events years later, veteran FBI agent Jack Cloonan [remarked](#):

"How often do you get into someone's suitcase and find multiple-entry visas? And how often do you know there's going to be an organizational meeting of Al Qaeda any place in the world? The chances are slim to none! This is as good as it gets. It's a home run in the ninth inning of the World Series. This is the kind of case you hope your whole life for."

What happened next is so inexplicable for purveyors of the official 9/11 conspiracy theory that it is typically never discussed.

After scoring this once-in-a-lifetime intelligence coup—this "home run in the ninth inning of the World Series"—the CIA then failed to watchlist either Al-Mihdhar or Alhazmi, allegedly lost track of them after they went on from Malaysia to Thailand (despite having the phone number of the hotel where they stayed in Bangkok) and failed to inform FBI investigators like Ali Soufan that these known terror associates had been tracked to an Al Qaeda summit. Most incredibly of all, the official record shows that supervisors in the CIA's bin Laden unit repeatedly and deliberately stopped agents from sending info about Al-Mihdhar's US visa to the FBI.

On January 5, 2000, while the summit was still underway in Kuala Lumpur, the CIA's Riyadh Station forwarded the information about Al-Mihdhar's visa to Alec station at Langley. Doug Miller—an FBI officer assigned to the bin Laden unit as part of an intelligence-sharing program between the CIA and the FBI—read the cable and, following protocol, immediately drafted a memo asking for permission to forward the info to FBI headquarters. The reply from Miller's CIA supervisor, [Michael Anne Casey](#), citing Alec Station's deputy chief, Tom Wilshire, was immediate and unequivocal: "This is not a matter for the FBI."

Thus began an 18-month odyssey in which 50 CIA personnel documentably accessed this information and not one of them ever officially shared it with any FBI or National Security Council official, even then-counterterrorism czar Richard Clarke.

CLARKE: You understand, the way they update us at the White House is: every morning, I come in, I turn on my computer and I get 100, 150 CIA reports. I'm not relying on somebody calling me and telling me things. You have to *intentionally* stop it. You have to intervene and say, "No, I don't want that report to go," and I never got a report to that effect.

SOURCE: [Interview #07 \(Washington, DC\)](#)

On its own, this is scarcely believable. The Central Intelligence Agency actively and deliberately made a decision to stop the automatic sharing of information on the most sensitive national security intelligence in their possession.

On September 12, 2001, when the CIA finally granted Ali Soufan's request from nearly one year before and sent him their intelligence about the Malaysia meeting, he began visibly shaking and rushed to the bathroom, vomiting on the floor next to the toilet. When one of his colleagues asked him what had happened, [he said](#): "They knew, they knew."

But neither Soufan nor anyone else familiar with the hidden history of Al Qaeda should be surprised. When put into its context, this episode is a perfectly predictable continuation of the same pattern of intelligence agency aid that, as we have seen, defines the story of Al Qaeda.

It is sometimes said that in order to be successful in their mission, the intelligence agencies have to get everything right all the time whereas the terrorists only have to get lucky once. But the Al Qaeda "terrorists"—protected, shepherded and aided by the intelligence agencies, as they demonstrably were—did not get lucky *once*.

They got lucky over and over and over again, time after time after time, year after year after year, from their earliest beginnings through their development and growth, through their rise to international prominence, through every major terrorist attack of the 1990s and right up to the doorstep of 9/11.

At this point, the "incompetence" theory of "failures" and "missed opportunities" is not only not supportable, it is a transparent falsehood. There is only one conclusion possible: These "terrorists" were deliberately aided.

This is not fringe conspiracy thinking. Even Richard Clarke eventually came to this conclusion.

CLARKE: For me, to this day it is inexplicable why, when I had every other detail about everything related to terrorism, that the director didn't tell me, that the director of

the Counterterrorism Center didn't tell me, that the other 48 people in CIA who knew about it never mentioned it to me or anyone in my staff in a period of over 12 months.

JOHN DUFFY: They were stopped from getting to you and stopped from getting to the White House.

CLARKE: And stopped from getting to the FBI and the Defense Department. We therefore conclude that there was a high-level decision in the CIA ordering people not to share that information.

RAY NOWOSIELSKI: How high level?

CLARKE: I would think it would have to be made by the director.

[. . .]

DUFFY: Have you asked George Tenet or Cofer Black or Richard Blee about any of this after the fact?

CLARKE: No.

NOWOSIELSKI: It kind of—the facts dripped out to you over time, right? Over these investigations? And then you started to—

CLARKE: It took a while.

NOWOSIELSKI: Yeah.

DUFFY: You've never approached them . . . ?

NOWOSIELSKI: You used to be kind of buddies with Tenet, right? So . . .

CLARKE: Look at it this way: they've been able to get through a joint House investigation committee and get through the 9/11 Commission and this has never come out. They got away with it. They're not going to tell you even if you waterboard them.

SOURCE: [Interview #07 \(Washington, DC\)](#)

That the former top-ranking counterterrorism official in the United States has publicly accused the former director of the CIA and other top CIA officials of running an operation involving the accused 9/11 hijackers and then covering up that operation and information about it up to and through 9/11—an incredible accusation recorded by two independent filmmakers and freely viewable on YouTube for the past decade—is apparently of so little importance that it has never been followed up on by any major media outlet.

But Clarke's version of the story, explosive as it is—that these accused terrorists really *were* terrorists, that they, like Ali Mohamed, managed to triple-cross the intelligence agencies that were trying to use them as double agents against Al Qaeda, and that the highest ranks of those intelligence agencies, up to and including the director of the CIA engaged in a cover-up of the entire affair, indirectly allowing 9/11 to take place purely to save their own skin—demonstrably cannot be the full story.

As we now know, these nineteen men were no devout Islamic fundamentalists driven by their devotion into striking against the infidels. These alcohol-drinking, strip club-attending bumbleres who, at one point, lived with an FBI informant and who left what investigators described as a deliberate trail behind them, were *not* master spies capable of triple-crossing the CIA.

They did *not* coordinate their plan to coincide precisely with the live-fly hijacking exercises, military war games and planes-into-buildings training drills that were [taking place on the day of 9/11](#).

They did *not* overpower the military-trained pilots on four separate planes before a single one of them could so much as send out a hijack signal.

They did *not* know to commit those hijackings precisely in the [highly classified radar gaps](#) that made their planes' movements opaque to flight traffic controllers.

They did *not* pilot those planes through maneuvers that even experienced pilots called "tough for any airline pilot" despite never having sat in the cockpit of a jumbo jet before.

They did *not* cause three buildings to pulverize themselves in mid-air, falling directly through the path of most resistance at freefall gravitational acceleration with two planes.

They did *not* decide to fly around the Pentagon to miss the Defense Secretary's office and instead hit the section of the building where [bookkeepers and budget analysts](#) were working on the problem of the \$2.3 trillion that Donald Rumsfeld had just 24 hours earlier [admitted](#) could not be accounted for in the Defense Department's budget.

They did *not* commit the informed trading that three separate academic studies have proven *did* take place in the run up to 9/11.

They did *not* engage in the decades-long cover-up of these facts in the wake of that attack.

And they did *not* launch the war of terror that sometimes saw the US and its allies using Al Qaeda as a convenient excuse for aggression in foreign countries and other times saw them actively collaborating with Al Qaeda to achieve their geopolitical goals.

No. Richard Clarke's story is itself a cover-up. The spectacular, catalyzing terror attack of 9/11 was not *allowed* to happen. It was *made* to happen.

But why? Who, other than the devout Muslim suicide warriors posited by the official 9/11 conspiracy theorists, would do such a thing? And for what purpose?

To answer these questions, we need to return to Operation Susannah and the false flag terror ruse that has been employed by the British, the Israelis and the US throughout the past century. As we shall see, just eight years after Operation Susannah failed in Egypt, the highest-ranking officials in the US military drafted plans to stage terror attacks, blow up airliners and even kill Americans in order to blame their political enemies. And, in the lead up to 9/11, a cadre of political operatives brought those plans into the 21st century, paving the way for a new Pearl Harbor that would begin a worldwide war of terror and a clash of civilizations.

GEORGE W. BUSH: Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.

SOURCE: *President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001*

TO BE CONTINUED...